DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 331 003 CS 010 520

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TITLE Reading Aloud to Children: What Children Have To Say.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) 1

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Childhood Attitudes; Childrens Literature; Elementary Education; Oral Reading; Parent Participation; *Reading Aloud to Others; *Reading Attitudes; *Reading Interests; *Reading Materials; Reading Material Selection; Reading Research; Story Reading

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to survey the attitudes of elementary students toward read-aloud experiences. Subjects were 575 children in grades one through six. The results of first grade students were omitted due to inconsistencies in their responses. The remaining grade level distribution consisted of 137 second graders, 121 third graders, 145 fourth graders, 119 fifth graders, and 53 sixth graders. Results indicated positive responses when children were asked if they liked to be read to and if they were read to at home. When asked about frequency of the read-aloud experiences, less than half of the primary children reported being read to at least once a week and the frequency decreased among the intermediate children, especially boys. Both primary and intermediate children reported reading to other children. When asked what they like to know about a book before it is read to them they responded with the highest percentages for the author's name and the title. Eighty percent of the primary students and 87% of the intermediate students like to talk about a book after it is read. When asked what kind of books students enjoyed, primary students gave the greatest responses for rhymes/jokes/riddles, picture books, and fiction/fantasy; intermediate students responded with the highest percentages for fiction/fantasy and rhymes/jokes/riddles. Students indicated the following as materials they enjoy reading at home: magazines, encyclopedias, books, comics, and newspapers. Students indicated a wide variety of responses when asked what they thought was the best thing about having someone read to you. (MG)

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READING ALOUD TO CHILDREN:

WHAT CHILDREN HAVE TO SAY

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1991

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READING ALOUD TO CHILDREN: WHAT CHILDREN HAVE TO SAY

This article is the result of a project patterned after a study by Mendoza (1985). The purpose of this project was to survey the attitudes of elementary school children toward read aloud experiences.

The project was carried out by 20 graduate students enrolled in a language arts course. The students developed the questionnaire as a group, and they administered it to students in grades 1 through 6 who attended schools in the local community.

The sample included 575 children ages 6 to 12. Of these, 296 were male and 279 were female. The results of first grade students were omitted due to inconsistencies in their responses. The remaining grade level distribution consisted of 137 second graders, 121 third graders, 145 fourth graders, 119 fifth graders, and 53 sixth graders.

The questionnaire items discussed the desire to be read to, frequency of read aloud experiences in the home, what the children wanted to know about a book before having it read to them, attitudes toward discussing books after being read to, reading material preferences, and the best thing about having someone read a story aloud.

This article provides the findings as related to each question. The findings are reported in the form of percentages by sex and grade level. A brief discussion and recommendation follows each question.

Question 1: Do you like to be read to?

The results were very positive; however, the affirmative responses were not as high as those obtained by Mendoza (1985). In the primary grades (2-3), 77 percent of the boys and 82 percent of the girls responded affirmatively. In the intermediate grades (4-6), the percentages were greater: 81 percent of the boys and 87 percent of the girls responded affirmatively.

Recommendation: Neither teachers nor parents should presume that children prefer to read to themselves once they have advanced into the intermediate grades. Teachers and parents should read to their children on a consistent basis.

Question 2: Are you read to at home?

Although the results were not as positive as the findings by Mendoza (1985), a majority of the primary students reported being read to at home: 58 percent of the boys and 63 percent of the girls responded affirmatively. Among the intermediate children,

41 percent of the boys and 52 percent of the girls responded affirmatively.

Recommendation: Teachers should communicate to parents the importance of reading aloud to their children at home. Teachers might provide age appropriate reading suggestions to parents who may not feel comfortable selecting books on their own.

Question 3: How often are you read to at home?

Among the primary children, less than half the children reported being read to at least once a week. The frequency of read aloud experiences decreased among the intermediate children, especially boys. These results were consistent with the findings in the study by Mendoza (1985).

Recommendation: It is not unusual for adults to stop reading to children once they are old enough to read for themselves. Parents and teachers should remember that there are benefits to reading aloud to children (primary and intermediate) and should make an effort to engage in this activity on a regular basis.

Question 4: Do you ever read to younger children in your family or children in your neighborhood?

The number of children who reported reading to other children was higher than those in the Mendoza (1985) study. Among primary children, 67 percent of the boys and 80 percent of the girls reported reading to others. Intermediate boys, 60

percent, and girls 84 percent, reportedly read to other children as well.

Recommendation: Teachers and parents should provide opportunities for children to read to each other. This provides them with oral reading practice and may positively affect their self-esteem. It also provides the listener with a positive role model.

Question 5: What thing(s) would you like to know about a book before it is read to you?

Author's name - primary children, 50 percent; intermediate children, 28 percent. These results were similar to those in the Mendoza (1985) study.

Title - primary children, 69 percent; intermediate children, 59 percent. This was not an option in the Mendoza (1985) study.

Summary - primary children, 37 percent; intermediate children, 38 percent. The results for primary children were significantly lower than the findings in the Mendoza (1985) study. The intermediate results were comparable.

Character information - primary children, 34 percent; intermediate children, 31 percent. These results were similar to those in the Mendoza (1985) study.

Setting - primary children, 28 percent; intermediate children, 20 percent. These findings were similar to those in Mendoza (1985).

Pictures - primary children, 57 percent; intermediate children, 33 percent. The intermediate results were significantly higher than those in the Mendoza study. The primary results were similar.

Nothing - primary children, 13 percent; intermediate children, 9 percent. These results were also similar to those in the Mendoza (1985) study.

Recommendations: (1) The author's name should be shared with students. Mendoza (1985) suggests that this may enable children to associate certain types of books with particular authors. (2) The title of a book should always be shared with children. It may serve as a hint as to the subject matter of the story or as a way to interest children in listening to the story. (3) A summary is worth sharing with students as a means of setting the stage for the story. However, it should be kept brief and not give away the ending. (4) Character information can also be useful in preparing the listener for the story and arousing curiosity. (5) The setting will probably unfold early on in the reading either as part of the text or in the illustrations. Therefore, it is probably not necessary to spend a great deal of

time on this topic unless it is worked in as part of the summary. (6) The illustration on the cover should be shared with children and briefly discussed since students seem to find this helpful. This too can be shared as part of a preview or summary. (7) The number of students who wish to know nothing about a book are few. It is not necessary to seriously consider this response.

Question 6: After a book is read to you, do you like to talk about it?

Among the primary students, 80 percent answered affirmatively. Of these, 49 percent reportedly like to discuss the books on an occasional basis. Among the intermediate students, 87 percent like to talk about the book, but 62 percent of this total like to do so only occasionally The intermediate results were much higher than those in the Mendoza (1985) study, but the primary results were similar.

Recommendations: Both teachers and parents should provide opportunities for students to engage in discussions following the reading of a book. Norton (1987) states that such opportunities enable children to enhance their enjoyment of reading and better prepare them to read on their own.

Question 7: What kind of books do you enjoy?

Picture books - primary, 53 percent; intermediate, 30 percent.

Fiction/fantasy - primary, 51 percent; intermediate, 60 percent.

Folktales - primary, 45 percent; intermediate, 26 percent.

Poetry - primary, 45 percent; intermediate, 28 percent.

Rhymes/jokes/riddles - primary, 72 percent; intermediate, 52 percent.

Nonfiction - primary, 50 percent; intermediate, 32 percent.

Biographies - primary, 38 percent; intermediate, 28 percent.

Recommendations: Children should be exposed to books from a variety of genres.

Question 8: What types of materials do you enjoy reading at home?

Magazines - primary 42 percent; intermediate 50 percent.

Encyclopedias - primary 38 percent; intermediate 16 percent.

Books - primary 72 percent; intermediate 59 percent.

Comics - primary 58 percent; intermediate 62 percent.

Newspaper - primary 38 percent; intermediate 26 percent.

Recommendations: A variety of reading materials should be made available in the home. Parents should let their children know that they think reading is important, and they should also model reading for information and pleasure.

Question 9: What is the best thing about having someone read to you?

The responses to this open-ended question were quite diverse. However, the most common responses were similar to

those reported in the Mendoza (1985) study. The most replicated responses are as follows:

Second Grade

"I like to say things along with the reader."

"You don't go slow.

"It is fun."

Third Grade

"They have more enthusiasm."

"You don't have to read."

"They read faster than me."

Forth Grade

"If you don't understand something, you can ask the person reading."

"You can realy relax."

"When someone reads to me, I know they care about me."

Fifth Grade

"I understand the story better."

"I get closer to my family."

"You can talk about it (the book)."

Sixth grade

"When someone reads to you, you get a different outlook on it (the story)."

"You don't have to read alone."

"You get to hear how other people read."

"It is easier for me to imagine what is happening."

References:

Mendoza, Alicia. "Reading to Children: Their Preferences". The Reading Teacher, February 1985, pp. 522-527.